Architect of Modern India: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Integration of the Indian States

By GEORGE C. HERRING, JR.*

One of the most pressing problems facing Indian statesmen in the hectic period of the British transfer of power was the uncertain future of the five hundred and sixty-two Princely States. For years these "Ulsters", or "ulcers", as members of the Indian National Congress referred to them, had been protectorates of the British government. Their rulers were autonomous in internal affairs but had given up power over defense and foreign affairs to the British. With the Cabinet Mission proposals of 1946, however, Britain made it clear that when she transferred power over British India to an Indian government, she would also give up responsibility for the states. The princes would have to fend for themselves.

What they would do was uncertain. Theoretically, they could accede to either India or Pakistan or assert their independence of both and establish separate governments. Some princes spoke of forming a "third force", a union of the scattered and divergent States. These latter options posed the greatest threat to free India. The Princely States comprised nearly two-fifths of the area of the Indian sub-continent and were populated by ninety million people. If they remained outside the Indian Union, the sub-continent would be subject to the same fragmentation which so often in the past had made it vulnerable to outside conquerors. The economic life of free India would be severely hampered and pockets of autocracy would exist within the boundaries of democratic India.

The most urgent task facing the Interim Government in the summer of 1947 was to draw the Princely States into the Indian federation. This task fell to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, long a power in Congress politics, noted for administrative and organizational genius, and Home Minister in the Interim Government. It was in

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large measure due to the skillful work of Patel that the "Balkanization" of India, confidently predicted by Winston Churchill and other Tory statesmen, was averted.

Vallabhbhai Patel was born in 1875 into an orthodox Hindu peasant family of Karamsad, Gujarat. He was educated in the English schools at nearby Naidad, entered the law, the principal avenue to respectability and prominence for an Indian in British India, and after passing the District Pleader's examination established practice at Borsad in Gujarat. Energetic and ambitious, young Patel quickly gained a reputation for legal acumen and saved enough money to achieve his ambition—an education in England. In 1910 he went to London and entered the Middle Temple. His years in London appear to have been devoted exclusively to study. He travelled little, seems to have gained little intellectual stimulation from city life, and read little outside his field. As a result of diligent application to his studies, however, he achieved the highest score on the barrister's examination in 1912. Immediately afterwards he returned to India.

In 1913, Patel established practice in Ahmedabad, a textile center in Gujarat. As a lawyer he was noted for common sense, a mastery of argument and persuasion, and biting sarcasm. He was a notorious judge-baiter, and his biographers now delight in telling how the Resident Magistrate's court was moved twice to escape his scathing attacks.[1] Legal success brought Patel some wealth and he became quite westernized in dress and habit. He was a prominent member of the exclusive Ahmedabad Club and was famous for his skill at cards.[2]

It was while playing bridge at the club in 1915 that Patel got his first glimpse of Mohandas K. Gandhi. He was unimpressed; in fact, it is said that Patel looked up from the bridge table for only a moment, made a sarcastic remark about the curious newcomer, and went back to his game.[3]

It was not long, however, before Patel ceased scoffing and became one of Gandhi's most devoted followers. Patel has left no record of his conversion to Gandhiism and it is difficult to account for his rapid change from Westernized lawyer to Gandhian disciple. It seems likely, however, that Gandhi's work on behalf of the peasants of Patel's native Gujarat was a major force in his conversion, and he appears to have been impressed with the program Gandhi offered

1. Narhari D. Parikh, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel* (Ahmedabad, 1953), I, 13.
2. *Ibid.*, 24-25.
3. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Collier Edition, 1962), 258.

and the persuasiveness with which he sold this program.[4] At any rate, in 1917, Patel ceremoniously burned his western clothes, donned *khaddi,* and became one of Gandhi's most trusted lieutenants.[5]

Gandhi quickly recognized Patel's organizational ability and put it to good use. One of the many legends that have grown up around Patel tells how he first demonstrated leadership by organizing a revolt against a teacher who was profiteering in pencils and books, ultimately securing the teacher's resignation.[6] In 1917, as a member of the Ahmedabad Municipality, Patel won fame throughout Gujarat for his tireless efforts on behalf of the famine-stricken peasants. Under Gandhi's supervision he directed a limited *satyagraha* (civil disobedience campaign) for the benefit of the impoverished people of Kheda in 1917, and in 1921, with Gandhi's blessings, he was elected President of the Bombay Provincial Congress. With characteristic energy he collected a *crore* of *rupees* for waging the *satyagraha* of 1921 and took a leading role in that effort himself.[7]

It was at Bardoli in 1928, however, that Patel emerged from obscurity to prominence in the Indian nationalist movement. Despite a recent famine which had left the peasants of Bardoli district impoverished, the British declared a 22 per cent increase in the land tax. The peasants were angry and restive, and Gandhi chose this opportunity to put his non-violent methods to the test. He entrusted leadership of the campaign to Patel, and his trust was vindicated, for his disciple carried it out with consummate skill. During the next few months he was everywhere, making fiery speeches, organizing the peasants, and maintaining strict discipline. He welded the 87,000 peasants of the district into a unit, dedicated to winning victory against the oppressive tax by Gandhian methods. Thousands were arrested, many lost their property, some lost their land; but they refused to pay the tax, resisted British attempts to coerce them into surrendering, and refrained from violence. Finally, the government gave in and accepted a minimal increase in the tax.[8] Overnight Patel's fame spread throughout India. The citizens of Bardoli bestowed upon him the title *Sardar* (leader), which stuck with him the remainder of his life, and he won the applause of na-

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4. *Ibid.,* 259.
5. B. Krishna, "Sardar Patel: The Human Side of the Iron Man," *Eastern World,* XVI (November, 1962), 15.
6. "The Boss," *Time,* 49 (January 26, 1947), 28.
7. P. D. Saggi (ed.) *The Life and Work of Vallabhbhai Patel* (Bombay, 1955), viii.
8. For a detailed description of the Bardoli campaign see Parikh, *Patel,* I, 297-367.

tionalist leaders in all parts of the sub-continent, even those who had opposed Gandhian methods. "Let us Bardolise the country," declared that ardent nationalist, Mrs. Annie Besamt, after hearing of Patel's victory.[9]

After Bardoli, Patel rapidly moved into the top echelons of Congress leadership. He was arrested for the first time in 1930—in all he was to spend almost eight years in prison—and in 1931 he was elected President of the Congress. In 1935 he became chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee, in which position he remained until 1940, and in the mid-thirties he directed his organizational and administrative talents toward reorganizing and rejuvenating a badly split and weakened party. During this period he gained a dominance over the political machinery of Congress which he retained until his death. His energetic and at times ruthless direction of the Congress machine led Americans to refer to him as the "Jim Farley of Indian politics." [10]

Patel was arrested in 1940 for his part in the individual civil disobedience movement and again in 1942 for his participation in the Quit India Movement. Released in 1945, he took part in the abortive Simla Conference with the British and later became Home Minister in the Interim Government. By this time he had gained a place with Gandhi and Nehru as one of the great triumvirate of Indian independence.

Of these three giants of Indian nationalism, Patel is by far the easiest to understand, for he had few of the complexities of Gandhi and Nehru. Practical, realistic, and often ruthless, he was most successful as an administrator and political manipulator. Unlike Nehru, he was not cautious about decision-making, and he had few compunctions about firing a friend or colleague whom he felt had outlived his usefulness. A man of blunt common sense and forthright manner, he was an extremely keen judge of human nature. He deplored speech-making, though he could be an inspiring speaker in his native Gujarati; he was extremely narrow intellectually and lacked both the compassion of Gandhi and the vision of Nehru. In the thirties he bitterly attacked those factions of Congress which had become dangerously split on their approach to the future political

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9. Krishma, "Patel," 15.

10. Robert Trumbull, "Nehru and Patel: Heirs to the Gandhi Tradition," *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 1948, 15. For an excellent analysis of Patel as a political leader see B. G. Gokhale, "Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: The Party Organizer as Political Leader," in Richard Park and Irene Tinker, (eds.) *Leadership and Political Institutions in India* (Princeton, 1959), 87-99.

and economic system of India. "I would rather adhere to my duty today," he somewhat naively stated on one occasion, "in the firm belief that if we stick to it, our problem of tomorrow will automatically solve itself." [11]

In public, Patel was cold and unemotional, and because of this he was able to establish rapport with the Indian masses only in his native Gujarat. There is a story that as a young lawyer, he was pleading an important case in the Ahmedabad court when he was handed a telegram informing him of his wife's death. Calmly and without expression, he read the telegram, then folded it and put it in his pocket and went right on with the case.[12]

Yet among close friends he could be warm and witty. Nowhere is this clearer than in his relations with Gandhi, to whom he was extremely devoted. So loyal was he, in fact, that in the twenties his enemies derisively termed him a "blind follower" of the Mahatma.[13] "If I am, I am proud of it," was Patel's only reply.[14] During the long days spent in prison, Patel helped raise Gandhi's spirits with his sense of humor, and when Gandhi was ill, the Sardar cared for him devotedly.[15]

From 1940 on, however, Patel and Gandhi gradually drifted apart. Patel refused to accept Gandhi's position on World War II and agreed with Nehru in his determination to support the Allied effort if the British made adequate concessions to India. It was the Hindu-Muslim communal issue, however, that drove the deepest wedge between them. Brought up in a strict Hindu environment, Patel never lost his orthodoxy, and his views in 1946 and 1947 appear to have been closer to those of the extremist Hindu *Mahasabha* than to those of Gandhi. From the beginning he opposed Hindu-Muslim unity. and when violence broke out in 1946 and 1947, opponents charged that as Home Minister he had not taken adequate measures to protect the Muslims.[16] At first Gandhi defended him,[17] but later even he began to suspect that there was vindictiveness in Patel's attitude toward the Muslims. Some observers feel that Gandhi's fast of January, 1948 was at least in part motivated by a desire to induce Patel to change his ways.[18] Patel vigorously opposed this fast, and said

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11. Parikh, *Patel,* II, 198-199.
12. "Boss," *Time,* January 27, 1947, 29.
13. Parkih, *Patel,* I, 266.
14. Saggi (ed.), *Patel,* 19.
15. Gandhi to Nehru, February 15, 1933, D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma* (Bombay, 1954), VIII, 357.
16. Gandhi to Patel, December 30, 1946, M. K. Gandhi, *Letters to Sardar Patel* (Ahmedabad, 1957), 205-206.
17. Tendulkar, *Mahatma,* VIII, 313.
18. Maulana Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (London, 1960), 253.

that Gandhi was acting as if he [Patel] were responsible for the murders of Muslims. After one of their last meetings Patel reportedly stated that Gandhi seemed "determined to blacken the names of Hindus throughout the whole world. If this is his attitude I have no use for him." [19]

On the afternoon of Gandhi's assassination Patel visited him at Birla House. According to Maulana Azad, Gandhi received him with "affection and kindness," but Patel was "obviously uncomfortable and his behavior was still dry and formal." [20] Several hours later the Mahatma was dead. The blow descended particularly hard on Patel. In addition to their quarrel, Patel as Home Minister was officially responsible for Gandhi's safety. An eyewitness relates that in the funeral procession Patel sat "immobile beside the body, pale and weary and looking straight ahead of him." Though quite ill himself, he travelled the six miles along the procession route.[21]

Nehru and Patel provide an interesting study in contrast, and the rivalry between them was open and often intense. Nehru was sophisticated, charming, eclectic; Patel blunt, dour, and narrow in his interests. Nehru was a masterful public speaker; Patel had an undisguised contempt for speechmaking, even more contempt for intellectuals, and bitterly opposed Nehru's socialism. The two men appealed to widely divergent groups. The liberal Nehru was the hero of the peasantry, working classes, and intelligentsia; the conservative Patel found support among party politicians, landlords, business interests, and orthodox Hindus.[22]

The mantle of leadership fell upon these two very different men in the days of the British transfer of power in India. The Congress election of 1946 decided which should be the top man. Though Patel was in line for the Presidency and controlled the provincial committees, Gandhi intervened as he had twice before, and gave his support to Nehru.[23] Thus when the Interim Government was formed in 1946, Nehru became *de facto* Prime Minister of India and Patel became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs. Together they constituted what has become known as the "duumvirate," and despite an intense personal rivalry, they submerged their differences for the good of the new nation.

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19. *Ibid.*, 254.
20. *Ibid.*, 258.
21. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (New York, 1954), 277.
22. Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (New York and London, 1957), 389-394.
23. *Ibid.*, 314.

Patel's most immediate problem as Home Minister was the future of the Princely States. The task of integrating these states into the Indian Union consumed much of his energy during the remaining years of his life, and for his service he is affectionately remembered as the "architect of modern India." [24]

The magnitude of his accomplishment is best appreciated by considering the problem facing the Government of India in mid-1947. The map of the sub-continent was dotted by five hundred and sixty-two Princely States, covering an area of 715,964 square miles (about half the total of the sub-continent). They varied in size from Jammu and Kashmir, with a territory of 84,771 square miles, to some of but several acres. The population of the states, according to the 1941 census, was over ninety-three million—about 24 per cent of the total population of the sub-continent.[25]

Unlike British India, the states had not been annexed but were bound to the British Crown by treaty. Most of these treaties left the princes autonomous in internal affairs while ceding to the Crown the power over external affairs and defense. The British were thus spared the expense and problems of internal administration and were assured of the princes' cooperation because of their military dependence. The princes, in turn, were left free to manage their states much as they pleased and could depend on the British to protect them from external interference.

Left to their own devices, the states developed in many different ways. Most of the princes ruled autocratically without considering the needs or interests of their subjects. In several of the states, education, industry, and representative government were more advanced than in British India, but these were exceptions to the general rule; most of them were feudal in economic and political structure. The people were soaked with exorbitant taxes, and the princes became international playboys, living in an opulent splendor unmatched anywhere in the world. The sovereign of Baroda owned a carpet made entirely of rare pearls, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds, and on auspicious occasions fired salutes for prominent guests from a cannon made of solid gold.[26] A visitor to the states counted two hundred and seventy cars in the possession of one ruler, one of which was a chromium-plated Rolls Royce with specially tinted windows which enabled the Maharani to see outside without being seen herself.

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24. Saggi (ed.), *Patel*, 9.
25. Government of India, *White Paper on the Indian States* (New Delhi, 1950), 17.
26. Rosita Forbes, *India of the Princes* (London, 1939), 129.

Another ruler owned over two hundred fine horses, each of which was housed in a luxurious stall, complete with electric fan and shower bath.[27] Many more examples could be cited. Though most of the princes were well educated, they were content to devote their lives to sport and women and were loathe to consider the welfare of the people living under their rule. From time to time, the British tried to induce the princes to liberalize their governments, but they stubbornly refused. As one exasperated British official expressed it: "the trouble with this wretched little State is that His Highness tries to run it like a bloody empire." [28]

For the most part, the British were content with this state of affairs. The princes were intensely loyal to their protectors and caused them little trouble. When plans were initiated for representative government and eventual dominion status for British India, however, the government grew concerned about the future status of the princes. In 1935, a plan was drawn up whereby the princes would be drawn into the Indian Federation, but they violently opposed giving up any of their sovereignty to the proposed Federation and the scheme fell through.[29]

In 1938 the Indian National Congress began to organize political agitation in the states, and the 1938 session of the Congress passed a resolution declaring that Congress would work for the same objectives in the states as in the rest of India. Individual Congressmen, Patel included, began to go into the states and form political organizations with the objective of curbing the authoritarian rule of the princes and establishing popular government.[30] "We want to bid goodbye to Princedom," Patel declared on one occasion. "We cannot allow our birthright of self-determination to be encroached upon." [31]

Threatened on one side by political agitation within their states, the princes sensed another threat to their position from the implications of the Cripps' proposals of 1942. Though noting that the treaties of paramountcy would not be revised without the approval of the princes, these proposals added that it would be wise for the princes to cooperate with the proposed Indian government, implying that they should ultimately enter the Indian Union.[32] The princes

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27. *Ibid.,* 128.
28. Kenneth Fitze, *Twilight of the Maharajas* (London, 1956), 170.
29. V. P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States* (New York, 1956), 34-39.
30. *Ibid.,* 42-44.
31. Saggi, *Patel,* 27-28.
32. Menon, *Indian States,* 50-52.

breathed a sigh of relief with the failure of the Cripps Mission and continued temporarily secure in their positions behind British power. From 1942 to 1946, the British frequently warned the princes that a change in their status might be necessary and urged them to prepare their states for such a change. But, as one British official recalled, the princes received these warnings with "frigid politeness" and did nothing.[33] Thus the dramatic announcements in the Cabinet Mission proposals of 1946 that with the independence of British India, "the relationship which has hitherto existed between the Rulers of the States and the British Crown will no longer be possible" startled the princes and left them divided and confused. The Crown assured the princes that paramountcy would not be transferred to the new government, but urged them in the interest of Indian unity to cede to the new government the powers of external affairs, defense, and communications formerly exercised by the Crown.[34] Though the Cabinet Mission Plan fell victim to disagreement between the Muslim League and the National Congress, it made the intent of the British Government toward the states unmistakably clear. Once independence was granted to British India, the states would be deprived of British protection and would have to fend for themselves.

The reaction of the princes was mixed. Some evinced a willingness to cooperate with the new government and with minimal concessions could probably be induced to join the Indian Union. Others wanted nothing to do with the new government and professed a desire to establish independent states. Still others wished to form a union among the many states—a chimerical scheme, considering the geographical dispersion of the states and the reluctance of the princes to sacrifice any of their powers.[35]

The strong stand taken against them by Congress leaders and the imminent threat that the sub-continent would be partitioned into two nations further weakened the position of the princes. Speaking for the Congress, Nehru expressed reluctance to negotiate with the princes, demanding that representatives be selected by the people of the states. He suggested, moreover, that those states which did not accede to the Union would be treated as hostile territories.[36] Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League tried the opposite approach, asserting that the princes should be free to accede either to India or Pakistan, or to remain independent if they chose. At the same time,

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33. Fitze, *Maharajas,* 155.
34. The text of the Cabinet Mission proposals is printed in Gandhi, *Letters to Patel,* 229-244.
35. Menon, *Indian States,* 63-69.
36. *Ibid.,* 70-71.

Jinnah began to court the princes, and is supposed to have provided the rulers of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Kashmir, and Hyderabad with pen and blank paper on which they could state their conditions for accession to Pakistan.[37]

Thus the situation was critical when Patel assumed control of the States Department of the Interim Government in June of 1947. All but a few of the princes were reluctant to accede to the Indian Union; the most powerful and influential princes were talking of independence and were being actively encouraged by Jinnah. Should they succeed in establishing their right to independence, lesser princes could be expected to follow. Shortly after Patel took office Travancore and Hyderabad announced their intention of establishing independent states and implied the possibility of a union of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Cochin, a union which would have taken a huge chunk out of the heartland of India and separated the Northern Provinces from the South. The possibility of communal violence loomed large in those states ruled by Muslims, though a large majority of the population was Hindu.[38] "The situation was indeed fraught with immeasurable potentialities of disruption ....," Patel later recalled.[39]

The Sardar moved quickly and with characteristic drive to meet the crisis. His first, and perhaps decisive, step was to appoint as his Secretary V. P. Menon, a long-time friend and associate and a man of proven diplomatic skill. It was Menon who set forth the initial plan of attack. Aware that time was of the utmost importance, he first proposed to deal directly with the princes rather than with representatives of the people of the states. The first objective was to establish the unity and security of free India. To attain this, he would ask the princes to accede to the Indian Union, requiring only that they turn over to the Government of India the power over external affairs, defense, and communication which in fact they had never exercised. Menon reasoned that most of the princes were only too aware that they did not have the power to protect themselves, and he was careful to point out to Patel that if the central government possessed the power to defend the states, it could legally intervene in the internal affairs of the states to restore order. The princes would not be asked to make political or financial commitments be-

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37. Wayne A. Wilcox, *Pakistan: The Consolidation of a Nation* (New York, 1963), 45.

38. Menon, *Indian States*, 90, 91, 94-95.

39. Quoted in Lord Birdwood, *India and Pakistan: A Continent Decides* (New Delhi, 1954), 44.

yond these three areas. As late as July 5, Patel asserted that Congress would not interfere in the internal affairs of the states.[40]

Though at first skeptical of Menon's plan, Patel and Nehru agreed upon this approach as the most practical at that time. Menon also advised Patel that the government should seek the assistance of Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy (and subsequently Governor-General). Menon contended that because of his charm and persuasiveness, perhaps more because he was of royal blood, Mountbatten would impress the princes and would be of inestimable value in convincing them to accede to the Union on the three conditions. Menon and Patel subsequently sounded out Mountbatten on the plan and he agreed to cooperate fully.[41] The first stage of the integration of the states was ready to begin.

On July 5, 1947, Patel issued a firm but conciliatory statement of policy toward the states. He pointed out that because of internecine divisions and jealousy, India had often succumbed to outside invasions in the past. "The safety and preservation of the States as well as of India," he warned, "demand unity and mutual cooperation between its different parts." He therefore urged the princes to think in the best interests of India as a whole and to turn over to the Union their authority over external affairs, defense, and communications. "We ask no more of them than accession on these three subjects in which the common interests of the country are involved. In other matters we would scrupulously respect their autonomous existence." The alternative to cooperation, he asserted, was "anarchy and chaos which will overwhelm great and small in a common ruin if we are unable to act together in the minimum of common tasks." [42]

From July 5 to August 15, 1947, Patel, Menon, and Mountbatten exerted constant pressure on the princes to accede to the Union on the proposed conditions. On July 10, a number of the most important princes met at Patel's residence. He warned them that only if they acceded would they have a voice in shaping the future policies of the central government. "It was this conference," Menon recalled later, "which at last broke the ice, clearing away a mass of vague suspicion which the rulers had entertained about the new States Department." [43] On July 28, Lord Mountbatten addressed a large gathering of princes in New Delhi. Dressed in full military regalia, the Viceroy delivered a persuasive and eloquent speech. He warned the

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40. Menon, *Indian States,* 97-99; Birdwood, *India and Pakistan,* 43.
41. Menon, *Indian States,* 98.
42. Government on India, *White Paper,* 157-159.
43. Menon, *Indian States,* 107.

princes that the liberal terms offered them now might not be repeated, and that after August 15 he would not be able to mediate for them with the new government. As an added inducement, he said that if they accepted accession now he was certain that Patel would allow them to receive honors and titles from the King for their past services.[44] "You cannot run away from the Dominion Government which is your neighbor," he concluded, "any more than you can run away from the subjects for whose welfare you are responsible."[45]

The princes gradually gave way under the pressure of Patel, Menon, and Mountbatten. The decisive day may have been July 25, 1947, when the Maharajah of Travancore announced the accession of his state to the Union. Travancore was one of the more important States, its Maharajah was influential among the princes, and his decision helped to create the bandwagon effect that Menon and Patel desired. Many rulers who had wavered indecisively up to this time subsequently announced their accession to the Union. Bhopal, Indore, Cholpur, Bharatpur, Bilaspur, and Nabha all chose accession within the next few days. A few still hesitated, and the desperation with which they faced their precarious position is clearly shown in Menon's negotiations with the imperious young Maharajah of Jodhpur. When the Maharajah demanded impossible concessions and Menon refused to meet them, he drew a gun on Menon, angrily exclaiming, "I refuse to accept your dictation." Menon calmly warned the Maharajah not to "indulge in amateur theatricals" and said he had nothing to gain by shooting him. After a moment of hesitation the desperate Maharajah broke down and accepted Menon's terms for accession.[46]

By August 15, the day of the transfer of power, all but three of the Princely States had acceded to India. This astounding success surprised even the most optimistic observers. Menon gives most of the credit for this victory to Patel's skillful handling of the princes. He was firm, but tactful; strong, but flexible. By his "unfailing politeness," Menon asserts, Patel won the complete confidence of the princes.[47] Other factors should be weighed, however, in appraising the success of the government's policy. First, the rulers seem to have been convinced that if they acceded before August 15, they would receive more liberal treatment by the government than if they hesitated. Secondly, they were well aware that the times and circum-

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44. Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, 140.
45. The text of Mountbatten's speech is given in Government of India, *White Paper*, 160-164.
46. Menon, *Indian States*, 117-118.
47. *Ibid.*, 122.

stances were working against them. The princes, particularly those ruling small and unviable states, realized all too well that they could not survive without the protection of the British, and that it would only be a matter of time before they were absorbed, willingly or not, into the Indian Union. They also realized that Congress had been instigating popular unrest in the states and that this would continue if they refused to accede. Thus when an opportunity was presented by which they could maintain most of their power they accepted it as the best possible bargain they could make. Finally, much credit must be given to the work of the tactful and gracious Mountbatten and to the diplomatic skill of the energetic Menon, who conducted most of the personal negotiations with the princes.

Despite the remarkable success achieved, the severest challenge remained for the new government. Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Kashmir, all large and vitally important states, did not bend under the government's pressure. On August 17, Indian officials were startled to learn that the Nawab of Junagadh, a state of 3,337 square miles and 670,719 people lying in the center of the Kathiawar region in Western India, had acceded to Pakistan. Junagadh was surrounded by states which had acceded to India; it had no common border with Pakistan and was three hundred miles from Karachi by sea; the population was 80 per cent Hindu, although the Nawab and most of the ruling class were Muslim. Junagadh's accession to Pakistan posed a grave threat to India. It had a voice in the councils of many of the small states surrounding it, and claimed sovereignty over others. A Pakistani outpost in the midst of these predominately Hindu States would not be accepted lightly by their people. The possibility of communal outbreaks was strong. Within several days of the announcement of Junagadh's accession to Pakistan, rulers of a number of these surrounding states protested and demanded that the government of India take action.[48]

Patel moved quickly. Menon was dispatched to Kathiawar to reassure the surrounding states that they would be protected and to discuss the problem with the Nawab of Junagadh. The Nawab refused to see him, and Menon returned to New Delhi only to find that Junagadh had sent troops into two nearby states which she claimed but which had already acceded to India. With this pretext, Patel was ready to dispatch troops to Junagadh and take it over by force, but Mountbatten dissuaded him. Troops were sent only to protect other states in the region from future moves by Junagadh. At the time Patel demanded that Junagadh troops be withdrawn from the

48. Menon, *Indian States,* 129-131.

areas they had occupied. When the Nawab refused, Patel sent troops and civil officials in to remove them. At this the Nawab fled from his capital, taking with him the state's treasury and most of his personal possessions. Following his departure a wave of lawlessness erupted in many parts of Junagadh and the Dewan (Prime Minister) asked the Indian government to intervene. Troops and civil officials were quickly moved in, a plebiscite was held, and the people voted overwhelmingly to accede to India.[49]

Pakistan protested vigorously against this Indian action but was ready to do nothing more. Jinnah apparently had no idea of defending Junagadh when he accepted its accession, but was merely attempting a gambit in hopes of embarrassing India or weakening her position elsewhere. He may have believed that Britain would prevent India from using force; he may have hoped that India would acquiesce to Junagadh's accession to Pakistan. There is little doubt that he hoped Indian failure in Junagadh would encourage other princes to assert their independence.[50] Pakistan has never accepted Junagadh's accession to India, but little mention is now made of it except as a point of argument in the continuing debate over Kashmir.[51]

Hyderabad proved an even more difficult case. Unlike Junagadh, Hyderabad was prosperous and well developed and might have been able to remain an independent state with Indian cooperation. The last stronghold of Mughul culture, Hyderabad also had a national tradition; and though it was a predominately Hindu state ruled by Muslims, communal antipathy had been conspicuously absent.

In early June the Nizam of Hyderabad announced his intention of establishing an independent principality when British treaties with the states lapsed. When the Indian government protested, he retorted that it was not inconceivable that he might accede to Pakistan.[52] From July to November of 1947, extended negotiations were carried on between the Nizam's representatives and Patel, Menon, and Mountbatten. But the Nizam was not willing to accept the terms which India had reached with the other states, and the government was unwilling to accept accession on any other terms. As a consequence, negotiations broke down. A standstill agreement, freezing the *status quo* until final settlement could be reached, was concluded in November, 1947, but its effects were short-lived. The govern-

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49. Menon, *Indian States,* 135ff.
50. Wilcox, *Pakistan,* 56.
51. Brecher, *Nehru,* 405.
52. Menon, *Indian States,* 324-325.

ment and the Nizam each accused the other of breaking the agreement, and relations were strained to the breaking point.[53] Violence soon broke out in Hyderabad and the surrounding provinces. Congress agitators from Madras and Bombay organized resistance to the Nizam within Hyderabad, and non-violent campaigns were launched which quickly gave way to violence. Extremist Muslim groups in Hyderabad countered by attacking Hindus and by stopping trains coming through Hyderabad from Bombay to Madras. The Communists soon joined the battle, first siding with Congress agitators, later with Muslim extremists.[54]

Patel continued to exert pressure on the Nizam to accede to India, and on several occasions the negotiations appeared on the verge of success. But each time the Muslim extremists forced the Nizam to make demands of the Indian government which it could not possibly accept. Indian opinion soon clamored for direct action against Hyderabad, but for the moment Patel and Nehru resisted. Finally, when negotiations between Hyderabad and the government broke down again in May of 1948, and stepped-up Communist activity in Hyderabad was reported, the government imposed a virtual economic blockade on Hyderabad, using as a pretext alleged violations of the standstill agreement by the Nizam. Increased violence and near anarchy in Hyderabad followed, and in September, 1948, Indian troops were sent in to "restore order." In eight days resistance ceased, the Nizam's cabinet resigned, and a military government was established.[55]

With the fall of Hyderabad, the accession of the states was complete,[56] and the first step in forging the Indian Union ended. Already the next step had begun. This second step—the integration of small states into large units—aimed at creating viable provinces where such did not exist, at creating greater homogeneity in the various components of the Union, and at bringing popular government to the states.

Despite Patel's earlier promises to refrain from interference in the internal affairs of the states, integration necessitated the sacrifice of more powers by the princes and ultimately reduced them to figure-

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53. Diplomatic correspondence up to June 1948 is printed in Government of India, *White Paper on Hyderabad* (New Delhi, 1948).

54. Percival Griffiths, *Modern India* (New York, 1962), 116.

55. Menon, *Indian States,* 372ff.

56. The exception of course was Kashmir, whose possession is still disputed by India and Pakistan. Because the case of Kashmir was handled separately from the other states and was handled by Nehru rather than Patel, it has been omitted from this discussion.

heads. Patel attempted to justify this violation of his earlier affirmations in a statement of December 16, 1947. He pointed out that democratization of the states had long been a major aim of the Congress, and that in their present conditions most of the states were not suited for democratic institutions. But the delay of self-government, he continued, could only lead to chaos and anarchy, and he pointed to "large-scale unrest" which had already gripped the people of many states and "rumblings of the Storm" in others. "In such circumstances, after careful and anxious thought, I came to the conclusion that for smaller States of this type . . . there was no alternative to integration and democratisation." He vowed to safeguard the property, dignity, and livelihood of the princes and offered them opportunities for service in the government. No force would be employed against them, but the compulsion of "events and of the circumstances and peculiar problems of their States." In conclusion, he said that the "voluntary surrender of most of the powers that they [the princes] wielded so far would increase and not reduce the prestige that they have enjoyed and would create in the hearts of their people a place of lasting affection and regard which would redound to their glory." [57]

The integration of the myriad of states into viable, democratic units was achieved in four ways. Small states adjoining Provinces of India were merged with these provinces. Contiguous states with ethnic, linguistic, and cultural similarities and with sound prospects of economic development were joined into one unit. The most backward states, politically and economically, were taken over and administered directly by the central government. Large states, economically and politically advanced, such as Mysore and Hyderabad, were allowed to retain their identities and became separate provinces.

The device of merger was first used with a number of small states in the Orissa region of Northeastern India. Most of these petty principalities were internally unstable, their people were restive, and the princes had inadequate means of maintaining law and order. Consequently, by a combination of threats, persuasion, and bribery, Menon and Patel induced the princes to merge their states with Orissa province.[58] In the same manner, seventeen Deccan states and one hundred and forty-four Gujarat states, estates, and *talukas,* and the larger state of Baroda were merged with Bombay Province. The same method was applied with a number of states in East Punjab, Madras, and the United Provinces.[59]

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57. Government of India, *White Paper,* 176-177.
58. Menon, *Indian States,* 161ff.
59. Government of India, *White Paper,* 44-46.

The joining of similar states into single units was first carried out with the two hundred and twenty-two Kathiawar states, which were formed into the Union of Saurasthra (land of one hundred principalities). The Kathiawar states presented a vivid picture of chaos upon the termination of British suzerainty. These states varied in size from Junagadh and Nawanagar to petty principalities with populations of less than two hundred, areas of only a few acres, and incomes of less than five hundred *rupees* per annum. Many of the larger states claimed suzerainty over their smaller neighbors, some states held isolated islands of territory within the confines of other states, and trade and communications were rendered virtually impossible by a multiplicity of customs duties and other barriers. A few of the states were relatively modernized, but most were feudal in political, economic, and social structure, impoverished, and dreadfully governed. Political agitation among the people of the states was increasing daily, and it is ironic that Patel, who earlier had organized agitation in many of these states, now had to dissolve these groups to maintain order.[60]

Since there was considerable homogeneity among the people of Kathiawar, Patel decided to amalgamate them into a single province. His plan provided for a presidium, composed of five rulers, from among whom a chief or *Rajpramukh* would be elected. The *Rajpramukh* would be responsible for calling a constituent assembly to be elected by the people for the purpose of drawing up a constitution for the Union of Saurashtra.[61] In this same way, twenty states in central India, including the large states of Gwalior and Indore, were united into Madhya Bharat; Patiala and a number of states in East Punjab were combined into Patiala and the East Punjab States Union, the Rajputanta states were joined into the United State of Rajasthan, and Travancore and Cochin were formed into a single province.[62]

States notorious for political backwardness and economic underdevelopment were taken over and administered directly by the central government. In several instances, areas of critical strategic importance were governed similarly. The first states so administered were Kutch, Bhopal, Tripura, and Manipur. Vindhya Pradesh was a special case. The thirty-five states of Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand, rich in mineral resources but economically stagnant, were originally united into Vindhya Pradesh. But the government proved unwork-

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60. Menon, *Indian States,* 177-182.
61. Government of India, *White Paper,* 52.
62. *Ibid.,* 54-57.

able. Local jealousies, maladministration, and corruption brought anarchy and chaos and forced Patel to intervene again. When he proposed to merge parts of Vindhya Pradesh with the United Provinces and the Central Provinces, the people and rulers of the states protested vigorously and defiant mobs gathered in the major cities. Under extreme pressure from Patel, the rulers finally agreed to merger, but then the Provinces with which they were to be joined refused to agree to the proposals. Finally, as a last resort, the central government took over the administration of this wayward province in January of 1950.[63]

With the unification of Travancore and Cochin, the process of integration was completed and the map of Princely India redrawn. Again Patel and Menon had achieved a virtual revolution in miraculous time. Several factors account for their success. In the first place, they exerted constant pressure on the princes to cede their sovereignty quickly and without argument. They warned that popular movements in the states were gaining increasing strength, and if the princes waited too long, they might be overthrown and lose everything.

As an alternative to this end, Patel and Menon offered the princes liberal concessions for the loss of their sovereignty. The government of India provided them with annuities ranging from 192 *rupees* for the Prince of Katodia, a tiny principality in Kathiawar, to 50,000 *rupees* for the Nizam of Hyderabad and 26,000 for the Maharajah of Mysore. These "privy purses" were tax free and were to last the lifetime of the prince. They were also guaranteed the possession of their private property. In some cases further concessions were made. Many rulers were promised positions in the Indian army and civil service.[64] The Maharana of Udaipur, whose state was integrated into Rajasthan Province, was entitled to a twenty-one gun salute and given precedence over other rulers on ceremonial occasions.[65] In provinces created from former Princely States, councils of the princes were entitled to elect one of their number as *Rajpramukh,* largely an honorific position, but entailing some administrative responsibility and providing yet another salve to the wounded dignities of erstwhile rulers.

These liberal concessions and the princes' realization that time and circumstances were against them did much to make possible a speedy integration of the states. Patel was severely criticized for the liberal

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63. *Ibid.,* 46-49.
64. Menon, *Indian States,* 476-477.
65. *Ibid.,* 264-265.

concessions made to the princes, especially for the privy purses which cumulatively amounted to more than fifty-six million *rupees* per year. In defending his action, Patel asked his critics to remember conditions as they had been in 1947 and 1948. "There was nothing to compel or induce the Rulers to merge the identity of their States. Any use of force would have not only been against our professed principles but would have also caused serious repercussions." "The minimum which we could offer to them as *quid pro quo* for parting with their ruling powers was to guarantee to them privy purses and certain privileges on a reasonable and defined basis." "Need we cavil then at the small—I purposely use the word small—price we have paid for the bloodless revolution which has affected the destinies of millions of our people." [66]

Many problems remained after the process of integration was completed. Democratic institutions had to be introduced into the new provinces and administrative machinery established where none had previously existed. Even before this process was completed, regional demands for states based on linguistic and ethnic considerations compelled another less extensive redrawing of the map of India.

Patel was not to live to see this process completed, for he died in December of 1950. The Sardar has been severely criticized for his methods of handling the princes, for the great pressure exerted upon them to accede to India and for going back on his earlier promise not to interfere in the internal affairs of the states. To criticize his general policy, however, is to suggest that the alternative might have been better for the princes, the people of their states, and India as a whole. While the end certainly does not justify the means, it is clear that the alternative to Patel's policy was chaos and disintegration. One must also remember that Patel's liberal concessions to the princes were greatly resented by many Congressmen who would

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66. Statement made in October 1949, quoted in Government of India, *White Paper,* 124. Criticism of the privy purses has persisted, but the Government has thus far remained faithful to its commitment. "There is no valid argument for the continuance of the privy purses," Nehru recently said, "but we are doing it because we have given our word." When the Government was desperately seeking revenue following the Chinese invasion in October 1962, the princes were asked to take a 10 per cent cut in their purses. Several of the state governments have begun to acquire the princes' lands, giving them in return fixed payments over a number of years. *The Washington Post,* December 15, 1963. Nevertheless, many of the princes have continued to play their traditional roles as international playboys, the only life they have ever known. Others have used the glamour of their names to become successful politicians or businessmen. The less fortunate have turned their palaces into havens for tourists and curiosity seekers.

have preferred that the princes be deposed and stripped of all their possessions. The people of most states were unsympathetic to their rulers' plights and probably would not have supported them. On balance, Patel handled the princes with a moderation and conciliation which belied his sobriquet, "The Iron Man," and it was largely this that made possible the amazingly rapid accession and integration of the Indian States. Due credit must be given to Mountbatten for his active support, Menon for his energy and skill in negotiation, and Nehru, who despite personal rivalry, supported Patel's policy throughout; but it is Patel himself who will be remembered as the "builder and consolidator of the New India." [67]

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67. Nehru, speech on the occasion of Patel's death, quoted in Saggi, *Patel*, 7.